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January 26, 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: John H. Holdridge

SUBJECT: CIA Assessment of Vietnamization

At our request, CIA's analysts took a look at the progress and prospects for Vietnamization. The result is a long, but comprehensive paper which is one of the best narrative reviews of the present situation that we have seen.

We have prepared a summary memorandum for the President.

RECOMMENDATION:

That you sign the memorandum to the President at Tab A.

Att.

NSS review completed.

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: CIA Assessment of Vietnamization

The CIA has produced the attached narrative review of Vietnamization progress and prospects (Tab A). It is based on a study of the views of ARVN commanders, and on an analysis of ARVN performance and the current activities of enemy forces.

The memorandum concludes that the real test of Vietnamization will probably not come until at least the end of 1970, by which time the Communists anticipate a substantial further reduction of US ground forces. Meanwhile, there have been both bright and disappointing spots in the performance of SVN forces. It is clear that the ARVN, especially, still has a considerable way to go in developing both the technical skills and the will to fight necessary to cope with a threat of the magnitude currently posed by enemy forces.

Some of the specific points made in the CIA assessment are as follows:

-- There is sound evidence that the territorial forces (regional and popular units) have greatly improved over the past year in all the standard indicators of efficiency, most notably their KIA rate. It must be recognized, however, that the improvement is based on a very poor performance base originally, and that further gains will come harder.

-- By contrast, the performance of the ARVN regular units has declined in the past year when measured in statistical terms such as the KIA rate, combat contacts, etc. This is not so much a reflection of deterioration in ARVN capabilities as an indication of a shift in enemy tactics toward initiatives primarily aimed at the territorial forces.

-- Late last year, surveys of the views of top ARVN leaders on Vietnamization found most of them optimistic about the future. Recently, however, a similar survey revealed a growing pessimism with concern

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centered around the fear of an overly hasty American withdrawal which would leave the ARVN badly vulnerable to renewed Communist main force pressures. It is worth noting that the pessimism has increased as the ARVN combat load has risen.

Progress by Corps

I Corps. ARVN units, among the GVN's best, have continued to hold the populated coastal sectors effectively. Communist main force units were largely driven out of these areas by US and GVN forces by early 1969. The Communists have not tried to mount a major new push since then, but do have large forces located in nearby border sanctuaries from which they could quickly intensify pressures along the coast.

II Corps. The first real test of Vietnamization occurred here in the summer when the Communists laid siege to two Vietnamese border strong-points. The results were inconclusive. Some ARVN units performed well, and the Communists suffered heavy losses, largely as a result of allied air power. However, they never really tried to take the camps, and one ARVN regiment was badly demoralized as a result of its combat experience. Along the coast, the ARVN has been holding its own, but its leaders fear the withdrawal of any American ground units from this sector in the foreseeable future.

III Corps. ARVN units here have traditionally been among the weakest in the country, and the US program has concentrated on raising their effectiveness. As a result some gains have been noted in two of the divisions, but the division closest to the enemy along the Cambodian border is still performing very poorly and could not hold its own against the Communist units arrayed in the area, if left without substantial US ground support.

IV Corps. The ARVN division which filled in for US ground units withdrawn in the upper Delta has so far not performed very effectively, and the enemy has begun to rebuild his position. The recent replacement of the division commander could help remedy this situation, however. The picture is brighter in the lower Delta where one of the ARVN divisions is considered as good as any GVN unit in the country. However, the Communists clearly intend to mount a strong test of Vietnamization in the Delta and have moved in several regiments in the western provinces to strengthen their position. ARVN performances against them so far has been mixed.

Att.

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